

## Sunday School

### PAUL A PRISONER—THE SHIPWRECK.

November 7 1909. Acts 27:39-28:10.

**GOLDEN TEXT.**—"The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate." Psalm 34:22.

#### DAILY HOME READINGS.

Mon.—Acts 27:27-34. Th.—Psalm 104:1-9.  
T.—Acts 28:1-10. F.—Psalm 104:24-31.  
W.—Ps. 107:21-32. S.—Psalm 77:11-20.  
S.—Psalm 23.

#### SHORTER CATECHISM.

Q. 80. What is required in the tenth commandment?

A. The tenth commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbor and all that is his.

#### TOPICAL OUTLINE.

How Paul was Saved from Shipwreck—

The ship run ashore, vs. 39-41.

All saved, vs. 42-44.

On the island, vs. 1-10.

#### LESSON COMMENT.

About fifty miles south of the island of Sicily and 150 miles southwest of the most southern point of Italy, situated at the western end of the valley of the Mediterranean sea, is the well-known Maltese group of islands, Malta, Gozo, Comino and the two islets, Cominotto and Filfla. Malta, the Melita of our lesson, is the largest of the group (17¼ miles long, 9¼ broad; area 95 square miles).

On the morning of the fifteenth day after they had loosed from Crete (November 59 A. D.), and after a voyage so tempestuous under the force of a terrific northeast wind (Euroclydon, Eurus and Aquilo), that anything like orderly and regular eating was rendered impossible for the entire fourteen days, Paul and the 275 soldiers, sailors and prisoners failed to recognize Melita (Malta) in the gray dawn of the rainy, tempestuous morning. On the night before (14th), surmising, probably from the roar of distant breakers on the shore, that they were near land, the sailors had prudently cast four anchors from the stern of the ship. They were now reeling under the force of the continuing storm and threatened with the new peril of reaching a shore amid the waves of a great hurricane. A hasty council of the sailors decided them to make an effort to save their own lives, leaving the soldiers and prisoners to whatever fate might await them. Under pretense of placing anchors out of the fore part of the ship, they had lowered the only life saving boat attached to the ship. Paul observed this unheroic ruse on the part of the sailors and promptly assured the centurion that if the sailors left the ship they would be lost. At the command of the centurion, the soldiers cut the rope and the boat dropped into the sea.

While waiting for the day, Paul found his opportunity—the hour for which his heart must have longed and waited. The trials of the journey had forced all of them, soldiers, sailors and prisoners, into a family group. Now they were tired, cold, hungry and in terror. Calling them together, Paul, with accents of warmest personal interest in them and of most assured faith in the safety of each of them, besought them to eat. With the calmness and assurance of true faith, he took bread and gave thanks to God before them and began to eat. The blessing of God came over all, and as they ate a feeling of good cheer was manifest. The man of mightiest influence of the 276 souls was now the Jewish prisoner, Paul, the servant of Jesus.

After daylight it was decided to make into a bay that, with its friendly shore, seemed to offer some hope of landing.

Driven at fearful speed, the ship made into the bay, no pilotage being possible. It soon found shallow water and drove the fore front of its hull deep into the soft mud and stuck fast. The hinder part was thus left an easy prey to the waves which beat upon it from two directions. The anger of two seas—to the north and to the south—poured out itself upon the exposed part of the ship. It began quickly to go to

pieces. Officers, sailors, soldiers and prisoners were now equally confronted with danger. But the soldiers were responsible for the prisoners, and life must answer for life; an escaped prisoner meant a doomed soldier. It is not so unnatural, however unfeeling it may have been, for the soldiers to have urged that the prisoners be killed at once. Fearful in thy state, Paul! The storm, the sailors, the soldiers, are alike pitiless. So for the other prisoners, for there were others. Not so fast. There is another on that ship. The storm knew him; the waves obey him. He had not yet terminated Paul's work. Quietly, unseen of others, he touched the centurion's heart. At once the centurion became Paul's champion and defender.

"Take no life. Every man for the shore!" The command rang out far above the voice of the storm. Ere long 276 souls, wet, cold but glad, found themselves on one of Rome's island possessions, and so among barbarians. The courteous Luke followed the habit and belief of all Greeks, calling all others "barbarians" (hoi barbaroi).

Paul, with his characteristic industry, came up pretty soon, with arms full of wood, gathered in haste and enclosing a deadly serpent, which, warmed into life and activity by contact with the burning pyre, darted fiercely upon Paul's nearby hand, held close over the fire for warmth. With a tenacity characteristic of the viperine, though not of the crotaline snakes, the serpent clung to Paul's hand until he shook it off in the fire. Recall here the assurance of our Lord: "These signs shall follow them that believe: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues: They shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover." On the island of Malta these words found fulfillment, not by the seeking of men, but by the dispensation of the Lord himself. It was God's key to the door of that island. The superstitious awe created by this notable sign—Paul's immunity from the poison of a serpent—led to the larger kindness of the people and of the Roman governor, Publius, to the healing of his (Publius') father of a serious and complicated sickness, and to an extended residence and teaching of three months.

**Lessons.** 1. Paul had longed to be in Rome and had prayed for a "prosperous journey" thither. (Rom. 1:9-11.) After he had fallen under the hard hand of the Roman power the Lord stood by him at night in the castle in Jerusalem with the cheering words: "Be of good cheer, Paul: for, as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." His prayer was receiving answer, and God's purposes were holding steadily on. So it is ever. He hears and sovereignly answers the requests of his servants, but in his own way. That way is sure and the only good one, though it may lie through "perils in the deep."

2. We have here one of the most striking and suggestive lessons of God's sovereignty and man's agency to be found in all the Word of God. A positive assurance that there should be no loss of life had been given Paul; also that God had placed the saving of all these lives into his (Paul's) hand. "Lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee." When the sailors proposed to take to the boats, Paul's prohibition, "Except these abide in the ship ye can not be saved," was in no sense a contradiction of the promise, "There shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship." God saved, but he saved through obedience to his command, and not through and in spite of disobedience; and this is but an example of his method of working and saving in all cases.

3. The detentions and reverses of life may be, and ought to be, and, under proper submission of ourselves to the mighty hand of God, will unfailingly be the rich and large places in our lives. The three months' residence of Paul and his companions on the island of Malta was unexpected and would not have been chosen by them. But we know from other sources that the life of the people and of their rulers was greatly affected and that there was a great and widespread turning to God. The catacombs beneath the ground and other inscriptions bore testimony to the work of God among the people in that island.

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